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The Unveiling of the Monument to Christopher Columbus

Washington
District of Columbia
June 8th 1912

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HRISTOPHER COLUMBUS was born in Genoa, Italy, in or about the year 1446.

He was the eldest son of a woolcomber and, having early evinced a decided inclination for the sea, his education was mainly directed to fit him for maritime life.

At the age of 14 he began his nautical career and for a number of years was engaged in commercial voyages on the Mediterranean, principally to the Levant.

About 1470 he married in Lisbon where he supported himself by making maps and charts and spent much time in study. Becoming convinced that the world was round and believing that Asia might be reached by sailing westward, he proposed to the Portugese king to make an expedition in that direction. Failing to enlist his support, he went to Spain (1484) and offered the enterprise to Ferdinand and Isabella. For eight years he met with no success and lived in poverty.

Early in 1492, after obtaining a personal interview with the sovereigns of Spain, Columbus was again refused, but a last effort with the Queen on the part of his friends was successful, and on April 17, 1492, the agreement granting the demands of Columbus was signed by the King and Queen.

Three small vessels were fitted out at Palos, the Santa Maria as flagship, the Nina and the Pinta. With these, manned by 88 men, Columbus left Palos August 3, 1492, and after an adventurous voyage, on October 12, 1492, discovered the island of San Salvador, one of the Bahamas, and took possession in the name of Castile. Various other islands were soon discovered, all of which he supposed to be outlying parts of Asia.

The Santa Maria was wrecked on the Haitian coast and Columbus, after leaving a colony of 40 men, set sail for Spain in the Nina January 4, 1493.

Arriving at Palos March 15, 1493, he was called to Court and received with great honor. In September he again embarked with a large expedition, and having discovered the Windward Islands, Jamaica and Porto Rico, and founded a colony in Hayti, or San Domingo, which he called Hispaniola, he returned to Cadiz, June 11, 1496, to clear himself of charges brought against him by jealous enemies.

Columbus on his third voyage (May 1498) discovered the mouth of the Orinoco, Trinidad, and other small islands. Reaching Hispaniola, there to recruit his enfeebled health, he found the colony disorganized, and in his efforts to restore it became again the victim of malice and misrepresentation. A royal Commissioner, sent to enquire into the difficulties, at once put Columbus in chains, and sent him to Spain. Popular indignation at this treatment caused his release, but his entreaties for redress did not obtain for him the restoration of his dignities.

The only subsequent employment of Columbus was the command of a small expedition (May 1502) to circumnavigate the globe. He discovered Honduras, coasted the Isthmus of Panama, and after much suffering returned home, reaching San Lucar November 7, 1504.

His renewed entreaties for redress were rejected and his remaining days were spent in poverty and neglect.

Columbus died at Valladolid, Spain, May 20, 1506.

The Christopher Columbus Memorial Commission

PHILANDER C. KNOX
Secretary of State

HENRY L. STIMSON
Secretary of War

GEORGE P. WETMORE
Chairman of the Committee on the Library of the Senate
of the 59th Congress

JAMES T. McCLEARY
Chairman of the Committee on the Library
of the House of Representatives
of the 59th Congress

JAMES A. FLAHERTY
Supreme Knight of the Order of the Knights of Columbus

COLONEL SPENCER COSBY, U. S. Army
Executive and Disbursing Officer

W. R. PEDIGO
Secretary

The Sculptor
LORADO TAFT

BY AN ACT approved March 4, 1907, Congress appropriated the sum of $100,000.00 for the erection in the City of Washington of a suitable memorial to Christopher Columbus, and created a Commission composed of the Secretary of State, the Secretary of War, the chairman of the Committee on the Library of the Senate of the Fifty-ninth Congress, the chairman of the Committee on the Library of the House of Representatives of the Fifty-ninth Congress, and the Supreme Knight of the Order of the Knights of Columbus. with authority to select a site and a suitable design and to contract for and superintend the construction of the memorial.

On February 4, 1908, the Commission selected as a site for the memorial the plaza in front of the new Union Railroad Station, and in the following November entered into an engagement with D. H. Burnham and Company to act as architects of the memorial.

In February, 1909, the Commission, after carrying out a program of competition during which twenty-one models were submitted by twenty competitors, selected Mr. Lorado Taft of Chicago as sculptor, and on March 4, 1910, a contract was entered into with Mr. Taft to furnish models for the sculptural work, to exercise supervision over its execution in stone, and to superintend its erection.

The following is the sculptor's description of the monument:

"The memorial has been given the form of a nearly semi-circular fountain, sixty-six feet broad and forty-four feet deep, constructed of Georgia marble. The central feature is a pylon or shaft some forty-five feet in height, crowned with a globe which is supported by four eagles, united by garlands. From the front of this shaft a boat's prow extends into the upper basin. The winged figurehead of this decorative vessel symbolizes the Spirit of Discovery, but might well be a personification of Faith. The ship serves as a pedestal for the statue of Columbus, which is fifteen feet in height and carved from a single block of beautiful white marble. This figure, wrapped in its medieval mantle, stands in a quiet pose with folded arms and steady gaze, expressive of the confidence of the great spirit within. The artist has wished to give it something of the simplicity of Egyptian sculptures, with their suggestion of calm and permanency.

From the lateral faces of the shaft project seated figures, somewhat heraldic in posture, typifying the Old World and the New World. The Old World is represented as a patriarchal figure resting the arms upon a shield and grasping a crumbled map. The New World, an Indian, crouches behind his rude shield and reaches for an arrow.

On the rear is a double medallion picturing Ferdinand the Catholic and Isabella of Castile, and beneath this relief is the inscription.

The grouping is completed by two couchant lions, set at the axis ends of the balustrade."

"To the memory of Christopher Columbus whose high faith and indomitable courage gave to mankind a new world."

[Inscription on the Memorial]

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